



Aboriginal news from across Turtle Island and beyond
January 14-18, 2013

First Nations, Harper meeting only Round 1 in long, hard haul

[Toronto Star](#)

January 12, 2013

Heather Scoffield



Shawn Atleo, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, admits he is taking on huge political challenges with a divided membership and weakened mandate. But he says it is worth it for Canada's native peoples. Fred Chartrand/THE CANADIAN PRESS

OTTAWA—Over the past few days, while National Chief Shawn Atleo was buffeted by harsh division between chiefs, [protesters in the streets](#) and a hunger protest with no obvious resolution, there were

“fleeting” moments when he wondered whether he should stick with the job.

He persevered, inspired by the people he meets regularly on reserves.

But as everyone took a deep breath on Saturday after a tumultuous week of politicking and brinkmanship that culminated [in a chiefs' meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper](#) on Friday afternoon, Atleo, the chiefs, the government and the protesters are all gearing up for an equally difficult Round 2.

“To be honest, I don't think any of us who face challenges don't have fleeting moments about how challenging these are,” the national chief said in an interview after he and his team left Harper's office in Ottawa's Langevin Block.

“But I’m driven by the faces of the young people I meet. I’m driven by the horrors of accompanying a family to the morgue when they identify the body, which is barely recognizable, of their 16-year-old daughter, who was brutally murdered.”

He reminds himself that none of the bare-knuckle politics he faces is as difficult or as important as the living conditions faced daily by many First Nations people.

“The challenges that we might face in our daily lives, I know that our people struggle every single day.”

Atleo will need that kind of guidance as he turns to put in place the decisions reached between Ottawa and the chiefs. The challenges are immediate.

For one, Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence is still denying herself solid food, and there seems to be no immediate compromise or solution in the works.

Danny Metatawabin, Spence’s spokesman, was asked to explain why Spence was not receiving visitors on Saturday: “(Friday) was a long day and a long battle for everyone. For now, everyone needs to rest. The hunger strike continues.”

The Idle No More protesters appeared to be regrouping for further demonstrations in the next week with only a few reports of protest activity across the country Saturday. And there was talk of blockades and demonstrations against pipelines and mining development in hot spots across the country.

At the same time, the Assembly of First Nations is fractured, even as it is assigned to figure out if diverse regions can sit down and re-examine the treaties that have defined their relationship with the Crown for decades, or even centuries.

The internal AFN politics are “tremendously difficult,” Atleo acknowledged.

Many chiefs wanted to boycott the talks with the Prime Minister on Friday since Harper would not agree to include the Governor-General in the gathering.

But Atleo said he received many private messages from supporters urging him to proceed with the meeting and he never lost the confidence of his executive. He is required to follow their instructions, and they never issued a formal call not to meet Harper in his working office.

“There’s no question that there is a lot diversity amongst our nations. I respect and recognize that to hear all voices is important.”

Now Atleo may be meeting with Harper again as soon as Jan. 24, and he is under pressure from all sides to show concrete progress, not just more procedure.

But the commitment to revisit treaties and speed up talks for land claims will mean negotiations between the government and individual regions on incredibly complicated topics involving historical documents, oral tradition and complex legal standards.

On top of that, there is widespread questioning of authority at every level. Chiefs are quietly questioning the power of the AFN as well as Atleo's mandate. Citizens are questioning the power of their chiefs and the government. And the existing power structure is based on the Indian Act: legislation that all sides recognize as abusive, outdated and problematic.

Replacing the Indian Act with a structure based on treaties and land claims, however, will require a generous amount of political will on the part of Ottawa, and hard work among the treaty nations to figure out exactly what they want.

But for protesters filling the streets and radicals threatening blockades, talk of treaties is not nearly immediate enough.

"Nothing here. Idle On," tweeted one protester in response to news of the agreement between chiefs and the government to launch high-level treaty and land-claims talks.

Government puts \$330.8 million toward First Nations water systems

[Global News](#)

January 13, 2013 10:06 AM



*Prime Minister Stephen Harper arrives to the Crown First Nations Gathering with David Johnston; Governor General of Canada; John Duncan; Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and Shawn A-in-chut Atleo; National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations in Ottawa on Tuesday; January 24; 2012. Chiefs from across the country have gathered in Ottawa to take part in a Crown First Nations Gathering. **Photo Credit:** Sean Kilpatrick, THE CANADIAN PRESS*

OTTAWA – The federal government is putting an additional \$330.8 million

toward improving the quality of water and wastewater infrastructure on native reserves over the next two years, Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan announced Sunday.

It's money that was already allocated in the last budget, though some of the communities that are getting money were specified.

"Our government is committed to addressing water and wastewater issues on reserve to ensure that First Nations communities have access to safe drinking water," Duncan said in a statement.

Duncan's office said the funding will be targeted toward more than 50 First Nations communities with water and sewage systems that were identified as either high or medium risk. The government named Canoe Lake, Sask., Tallcree First Nation, Alta. and Nazko, B.C. as examples.

The government says this builds on \$202.5 million of annual investments it was already putting toward First Nations water infrastructure.

The announcement follows meetings between First Nations leaders and Prime Minister Stephen Harper and, separately, Gov. Gen. David Johnston on Friday.

Many native leaders boycotted these meetings because Johnston was not part of the official policy discussions.

On doctor's orders, Shawn Atleo takes some time off

[Postmedia News](#)

January 14, 2013

Jordan Press



National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Shawn Atleo speaks at a news conference in Ottawa, Thursday.

Photograph by: Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press, Postmedia News

OTTAWA—After an emotionally and physically grueling two weeks, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations is

taking some time off to recover after being ordered to do so by his doctors.

Shawn Atleo made the statement Monday morning, days after he and a majority of regional chiefs from the AFN met with Prime Minister Stephen Harper to discuss treaty issues, concerns about the government's two budget bills and economic development on reserves.

In a [letter posted to the AFN website Monday](#), Atleo said many "long conference calls, late night meetings, and frustrations" over the past two weeks had "caught up" with him and that he was taking "some time" to recover.

I am proud of the support we received from First Nations citizens and Chiefs across Canada, even during the most difficult days. There were many long conference calls, late night meetings, and frustrations in the past two weeks. I regret to have to tell you that those long days have caught up with me. This weekend, my doctor ordered that I take some time now to rest and recover and I have agreed with my family that I do this now," the letter reads. (The full text is pasted below.)

The lead-up to the Friday meeting with Harper and a ceremonial meeting with the Governor General at Rideau Hall was marked by late nights, emergency meetings with AFN executives and officials from Harper's office, conference calls, meetings and negotiations on what the chiefs wanted from Harper. In television interviews Friday after the meeting with Harper ended, Atleo appeared tired and admitted it had been a trying week.

"It has been an incredibly challenging, most difficult week, but this is the hard work of seeking real change for our people," Atleo told APTN News Friday night.

The government agreed to three of the eight requests chiefs put forward Friday, including a "comprehensive" process to review claims and treaty implementation, which would also include potentially giving First Nations a bigger slice of revenues from the development of natural resources in their territories, which the AFN said is needed to help bring many aboriginal communities out of poverty.

Oversight is also expected to be enhanced, with Harper's office and the Privy Council Office, the central bureaucracy that aides Harper and his cabinet, more involved in sticky issues.

However, there was no movement on the budget bills, with the government arguing Friday that it had fulfilled its constitutional duties by consulting with First Nations over changes in environmental assessments in the Navigable Waters Protection Act and changes to the Indian Act that lowered the threshold required for a band to lease their lands to non-natives.

Aboriginal chiefs have vowed to have a day of action on Wednesday, and the Idle No More protest movement, which was the catalyst for much of the action on Parliament Hill last week,

has also called for a day of action later this month. Meanwhile, Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence vowed to continue her hunger strike despite calls from fellow chiefs to end her action.

Full text of the Atleo letter:

January 14, 2013

First Nations citizens have just witnessed one of the most important chapters in our recent history. Through the pressure of the grassroots, the sacrifices made by Chief Spence and her fellow strikers, and the work of many regional Chiefs and the National Executive of the AFN, we have seized the attention of Canadians and of this government.

We forced open the door to the PMO and to the Governor-General. We achieved a commitment to the personal leadership of the Prime Minister, the Privy Council Office and other senior ministers. Now they know that the whole world is watching what progress we make. Now they understand the consequences of failure.

We have a responsibility to work together to push forward our work that relates to each of the eight elements that emerged from our discussions this week – on Treaty, on comprehensive claims, resource revenue sharing, action to assess and halt provisions of legislation that contravene our rights, on the urgent needs of our communities and justice for our missing women. We have leaders in place to ensure that detailed work gets done. And now we have the public commitment of this government and this Prime Minister that they will treat these issues as their priorities.

I am proud of the support we received from First Nations citizens and Chiefs across Canada, even during the most difficult days. There were many long conference calls, late night meetings, and frustrations in the past two weeks. I regret to have to tell you that those long days have caught up with me. This weekend, my doctor ordered that I take some time now to rest and recover and I have agreed with my family that I do this now.

I ask that Regional Chief Augustine continue to chair and facilitate our National Executive meetings in my brief absence and that Regional Chief Bellegarde and Regional Chief Wilson-Raybould continue the work that they led this week on Treaty implementation and on comprehensive claims. As we did in the meeting on January 11 – we must seize the agenda and drive the next steps on each and every element. I encourage everyone to contribute fully to these next steps. I have also directed the senior staff of the Assembly of First Nations to mobilize staff working teams on these elements to provide the analysis and support required.

Finally as we have done from the very beginning, we continue to offer our support and prayers for Chief Spence, the hunger strikers and for all of our peoples standing up through peaceful

demonstrations and protest. As we told the Prime Ministers – our voices, the voices of all of our citizens will not be silenced. We will drive change now.

Friends and colleagues, this has been a fateful moment in the decades of struggle by our peoples. We have secured important new ground. Now the harder, but less visible, work of turning promises into action begins. I look forward to working with all of you on those tasks in the weeks and months ahead. Together I am confident we ensure that this week marks the end of a long bitter chapter of paralysis and provocation in our relationship with the GoC, and that it truly is the beginning of a new chapter.

I will see you all very soon and will return re-invigorated and strengthened to work with you to drive this change together with all of you.

Kleco Kleco

Shawn A-in-chut Atleo

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First Nations leaders, Idle No More activists warn peaceful protests could turn into months-long blockades this spring

[National Post](#)

Jan 14, 2013 9:34 PM ET

Kathryn Blaze Carlson



First Nations leaders and Idle No More activists have promised only peaceful protests on their national day of action Wednesday, but once the snow melts and warmer weather sets in, key highways — including the main road to Alberta’s Fort McMurray, a major oil production hub — could be blocked for days, weeks or even months, prompting what one chief called “chaos.”

These latest threats of economic upheaval come at a fragile moment in First Nations-Crown relations,

especially now that National Chief Shawn Atleo announced on Monday that a regional chief will take over his duties while he takes a “brief” doctor-ordered stress leave.

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief Allan Adam said that while there are no plans to shut down Highway 63, the only all-weather road to Fort McMurray, on Wednesday, the government should expect a months-long summer blockade if it does not repeal or amend its recently passed omnibus budget bill that made changes to the Indian Act and the Navigable Waterways Act.



Dave Chidley / The Canadian Press People from Aamjiwnaang First Nation and supporters gather for a meeting with officials as their blockade of the CN St. Clair spur line continues in Sarnia, Ont., on Sunday, December 23, 2012.

“If we’re going to shut down that highway, we’re going to shut it down completely — and not just for one day,” he said, warning that “every major highway across the country” would fall to a similar fate. “It’s escalated to a point where people’s frustrations

are beginning to run out, and when people’s frustrations run out, things happen.”

In Southern Ontario, Grand Chief Gordon Peters of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians warned that Wednesday’s planned disruption along Highway 401 near Windsor is just a taste of what could come if the Harper government does not acquiesce.

“We want to demonstrate some of the things we have the power to do,” he said, adding that he plans to raise the issue of a longer highway blockade at a chiefs assembly sometime in the spring. “There would be chaos.”

In an interview with the *National Post*, Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner Chief Chris Lewis agreed that there would, indeed, be chaos if protesters shut down Highway 401 for days on end, though he emphasized the force’s commitment to avoiding another Ipperwash — the 1993 standoff that saw First Nations protester Dudley George shot and killed by police.

“There would be a point where we’d have to take action,” he said. “How we do it and when we do it is critical.”

That fact is not lost on the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, which sent letters to all the major police forces across the country on Monday asking them to avoid using “unnecessary force or tactics.” Nor is it lost on Rob Clarke, an aboriginal Conservative MP and an 18-year veteran of the RCMP, who said he is “worried” about the looming protests, or Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan, who on

Monday told Postmedia News that he expects police to step in if demonstrations lead to “things being shut down.”



Patrick Doyle / The Canadian Press An aboriginal protester waves a flag in front of Langevin Block as Prime Minister Steven Harper meets inside with native leaders across from Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Friday.

Activists warned last week they would wreak economic havoc across the country on Wednesday, with reports of at least one major protest shutting down a lane of traffic along the

Ambassador Bridge, North America’s busiest border crossing that connects Southern Ontario with Michigan. Commissioner Lewis said the OPP has been in touch with the organizers, but said the bridge itself falls under the jurisdiction of Windsor Police.

“If people get pushed the wrong way, then [violence] could happen,” Chief Adam said. “One wrong move ... one wrong spark, and it will erupt.”

Idle No More blockades along Ontario rail lines already provoked two court decisions since December, shining a bright light on the murky world of policing First Nations protests. For Commissioner Lewis, the OPP’s main role is keeping the peace and protecting the public — and not, in any way, purporting to play a role in resolving the centuries-old issues underlying the protests.



Geoff Robins / The Canadian Press Native protesters from the Idle No More movement listen to speakers during a flash mob round dance demonstration blocking an intersection in downtown London, Ontario on Thursday.

For Grand Chief Peters, First Nations protests are “not a police matter,” but rather a “political” one. When asked about an officer’s duty to enforce the rule of law, he said it is not the officer’s job to get involved because he should not “get caught up being the middleman.”

While he and Chief Adam threaten road closures, several high-profile chiefs have gone to great lengths to distance themselves from such rhetoric. On Sunday night, the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs released a statement saying Grand chief Derek Nepinak does not condone violence, and on Monday Grand Chief Stan Louttit — whose territory includes Chief Theresa Spence's Attawapiskat — said in an interview that protests should be strictly peaceful.

"I can't speak for [Chief Adam]," Grand Chief Louttit said. "We don't know what could happen, but we know the history of Oka, Ipperwash and Caledonia. When push comes to shove, yeah, it could end up in the balance, but that's not our intention."

A spokesperson for CN Rail said the company is "watching the situation closely." The RCMP did not provide comment before deadline Monday evening.

National Post

Police, First Nations meet to fix 'broken' relationship: Thunder Bay Police, OPP and Nishnawbe Aski Nation aim to help ease residents' worries

[CBC News](#)

Jan 15, 2013 11:20 AM ET

In an effort to build trust and bolster communications between First Nations communities and police, a forum on community safety will take place Tuesday night in Thunder Bay.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation has arranged the event in partnership with Thunder Bay police and the Ontario Provincial Police.



Nishnawbe Aski Nation deputy grand chief Alvin Fiddler has said in the past First Nations people have many concerns about their interactions with police. A meeting in Thunder Bay tonight aims to help address those concerns. (Jody Porter/CBC)

Deputy Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler said the meeting will also be a chance for police to update people on two investigations — [one concerning a sexual assault](#) on a First Nations

woman, and the other, [an allegation of police misconduct](#).

Fiddler said ongoing communication between NAN and police is crucial.

"I think you could almost say that the relationship is broken," Fiddler said.

"But it's also our hope that, through dialogue and starting with this event ... we can start to rebuild that relationship."

Fiddler also said he hopes to see a broader discussion on community safety at tonight's forum.

"It's an issue for the whole city," he said.

"That's why we selected the venue of the community auditorium because it's a gathering place for the community ... We want to ensure that everyone feels safe in this community."

Fiddler also welcomes the police update on the two investigations.

"It's important that we provide that assurance to the students, to the families, to the leadership, to the community, that these are being treated very seriously, and that steps are being taken to look at those two cases," he said.

Parents and leaders in northern communities have voiced concerns about students' safety in Thunder Bay.

The community safety forum begins at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the Thunder Bay Community Auditorium.

Canadian taxpayers' federation pitches solution to end First Nations poverty

[Canadian Press](#)

January 15, 2012



Grand Chief Derek Nepinak of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs addresses First Nations protesters outside the meeting between Prime Minister Stephen Harper, national chief of the Assembly of First Nations Shawn Atleo and other chiefs in Ottawa on Friday, Jan. 11, 2013. Photograph by: Fred Chartrand, The Canadian Press, Postmedia News; With Files From Tobi Cohen, Postmedia News

OTTAWA - An influential lobby group says Ottawa needs to ditch the Indian Act and give First Nations more control over their land to end aboriginal poverty.

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation has close ties with the federal Conservatives, and its campaign to open up chiefs' books to the public was instrumental in recent legislation to publish salaries and benefits.

Now the group says the key to eliminating the cycle of poverty on reserves is for Ottawa to treat First Nations people like everyone else.

"For the sake of kids living in poverty on too many reserves, we don't need another decade with more social programs and tinkering," said Colin Craig, the group's Prairie director.

"We need a new approach, one that treats all Canadians the same and connects aboriginal people with jobs and opportunities."

That means Ottawa should get rid of legislation such as the Indian Act, parts of the Criminal Code that allow for reduced sentences, as well as arts grants for aboriginals — while respecting treaties and the Constitution, he said.

The federation also says band members should be able to own their homes, and develop, lease or sell their reserve land without Ottawa's permission.

The group is also proposing a pilot project that would see funding go directly to band members, and then have the band council tax some of it back to pay for services.

"Whatever the Harper government decides to move ahead with, it should first discuss the changes with grassroots taxpayers and grassroots people living on reserves," Craig said in a statement.

His proposals are bound to be controversial.

The federation made many enemies among First Nations leaders when it published a list of high salaries going to chiefs and pushed for legislative changes.

The Assembly of First Nations has also resisted some proposed changes to land and home ownership.

And while many chiefs say they want to get rid of the Indian Act, the assembly argues that it needs to be done methodically so that there is a better structure in place — based on treaty and aboriginal rights — by the time the old structure disappears.

Impatience among First Nations with the existing system is boiling over. Chiefs are squaring off against each other, aboriginal protesters are in the streets in growing numbers, and Wednesday is likely to bring demonstrations across the country